Gratitude- Part One

## (Philippians 4:1-13)

It’s so wonderful to have all of you with us today as well as those of you on the other side of computer screens around the world. We are starting a brand-new message series today entitled “Gratitude” which I believe is going to speak to the hearts of many people. We’re going to talk about the enemies of gratitude, kind of like the Grinch that stole Thanksgiving, considering those things which lead us to become dissatisfied and discontented in our own hearts.

Some have suggested that discontentment has never been a bigger problem in the history of the world than it is today. In other words, so many people that have so much and yet they are feeling entitled to more and are discontent with what they have. In fact, many people have begun to blame social media as one of the biggest forces behind this epidemic of discontentment. Because the truth is that when we look at other people’s lives on social media, it’s always the perfect picture, the perfect scene, with the perfect filtering that we see. So naturally we feel like so much less, because we know our behind-the-scenes, and we are comparing our lives with everybody else’s filtered Photoshop picture.

This is a very real, very serious issue causing discouragement and depression among countless millions. And so, as we come to this week of Thanksgiving, we want to be honest and expose any discontentment that we have in our hearts so that we’re able to live a life of thankfulness.

It’s in that context that we want to find encouragement from the Word of God, and so we’re going to turn to Philippians chapter four where the apostle Paul is going to tell us how to have a mind that is guarded by the peace of God. Now, if you know anything about the situation in which the apostle wrote this letter to the Philippians having joy and peace would seem to be the furthest thing from his mind considering his circumstances. At this time of his ministry, he had been detained, arrested illegally, taken by ship to Rome, where he was now awaiting trial. And yet, in spite of all that, he never lost his focus, in fact he said,

“I want you to know…that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (Philippians 1:12).

In other words, no matter what he was going through, he wasn’t thinking about himself, he wasn’t worried about his own circumstances, but he was concerned about the well-being of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And so, chapter after chapter he expresses his concern that they experience the fullness of joy in their circumstances, learning from and following Christ’s example of humility with a submissive, supernatural, single-mindedness. As we come to chapter four, having laid that foundation, he’s going to talk to us about relational, material, financial, and circumstantial discontentment that will steal our gratitude.

He begins in Philippians chapter four, verse two, addressing a relational disagreement in the church. In spite of his own circumstances, he encourages these two women in Philippi to face their differences and make things right. He says,

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:2-3).

And so, these were his fellow workers in ministry but worry and anxiety had so filled their minds that it began to pull them in different directions. In other words, that’s what anxiety does, it literally strangles people, it weighs us down, and it tears us apart.

In fact, if you’ve been feeling isolated, you don’t have to be in a house locked up by yourself to feel isolated. The apostle was powerful, anointed, gifted, and chosen by God, but now he’s in isolation and the only company he has are the soldiers that are assigned to guard him. And as I thought about this, I realized that he didn’t know how the story was going to end. He doesn’t know whether this is his last day, and maybe he accepted it since his master was crucified, but he resigned himself to it not knowing whether God had another miracle for him or not.

I want to talk to those of you who are struggling with gratitude because you are dealing with uncertainty. Some of you don’t know what to believe, you don’t know whether to use your faith to accept your situation or to use your faith to fight your situation, because you don’t know whether this is God’s will or whether the devils at work again. And so, you don’t know whether this is how your story ends or whether God is going to do something after all. You don’t know, but you wonder if maybe there’s another miracle left for you, and yet you’re not sure.

The apostle Paul didn’t know what tomorrow would bring. He didn’t know if he was going to lose his head, if he was going to be crucified, or maybe thrown into the lion’s. And so, he doesn’t know if this meal is his last meal, or this night is his last night, but he has settled into the uncertainty and made himself comfortable in an uncomfortable situation, chained to a Roman guard.

It’s in that situation that he is praying about this church in Philippi, concerned for these believers who are close to his heart, and the Holy Spirit knowing the root of their conflict, tells them how to break this cycle so that they can enjoy the peace of God again. He says,

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:4-5).

Well, that’s good preacher talk, but how can we do that Paul? I mean, this is not your life, it’s not your situation, it’s not your story, and you’re not even here. But Paul himself was in this toxic situation, this environment of uncertainty, locked in a prison of anxiety, and he says,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

And so, the apostle exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord always, keeping our eyes on him instead of on our circumstances, seeing him in every situation of life, and practicing staying in the presence of Christ as he works out his perfect will in our lives. He says, “The Lord is near,” meaning that he is right here, he is near to help us right now, and if we keep that in mind in every situation, every circumstance, and every conflict, it’s easier to experience the peace of God and get along with other people.

Therefore, as we enjoy the presence of the Lord, honoring him in worship, letting him search our hearts and our minds, then we are able to know the peace of God which transcends all understanding. It’s as the Bible says,

“As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV).

And so, it’s those wrong thoughts, entertaining those wrong thoughts, that will lead to discontentment and discouragement. Just like scrolling through Facebook or whatever social media platform you prefer, and you see so and so in a relationship, they’re always together, always hanging out with friends, or maybe you see someone else who looks like they have the perfect marriage. And all of a sudden you find yourself being just a little bit envious of someone else’s relational status.

And so, Paul says, “Finally,” in verse eight,

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

In other words, he says, you’ve got to have the right kind of thinking, spiritual thinking that will lead to peace. Don’t make excuses about your circumstances, don’t make excuses about your problems, don’t make excuses about your situation, don’t even tell me about your credit rating, your business, or your relationship with your children, but whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

It’s no wonder the Holy Spirit tells us in another place to fix our thoughts on Jesus, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, because as the prophet Isaiah said,

“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast” (Isaiah 26:3).

And so, it’s as we fix our eyes on Jesus, meditating on the one who is the Word of God that we will find perfect peace, because the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

The next enemy to gratitude in our lives that we need to watch for is a material or financial discontentment. This is a big one in our media saturated world, because someone just got a new car, someone else just moved into their new house and they are posting pictures. But the apostle Paul had his mind fixed, and he had peace in his heart concerning his personal needs, and so he thanks the Philippians for their gifts and says,

“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Philippians 4:10-11).

Paul never viewed himself as a victim of his circumstances, but he trusted God in his circumstances which is how he could rejoice even when he was in chains.

This is an enemy of gratitude that if I am being really honest often trips me up. It’s what I would call a circumstantial discontentment and so I had to stop scrolling on social media looking at pictures of my friends out hunting, or at the football game, or celebrating at someone’s house, because like some of you I have responsibilities all week, many nights, as well as weekends. And so, there would be just a little twinge of envy and discontentment that would begin to creep in, and I would have to remind myself that I am doing something significant and eternal.

In other words, I know the Lord is not going to tell them, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” for bagging that twelve-point trophy buck instead of going to Bible study (Matthew 25:21). “Well done my good and faithful servant,” for going to the football game instead of going to church. And that’s what I love about Paul’s response to the Philippians, because in spite of the threats of discontentment, whether relationally, materially, or circumstantially he was able to redirect both his and their attention responding with a Christlike perspective.

Again, I want to remind you of the context because Paul had been taken by ship to Rome, but on the way, they encountered a nor’easter and were shipwrecked on the island called Malta (Acts 28:1). And so, they stayed on the island for the winter before setting sail once again on another ship traveling first to Syracuse, to Rhegium, and to Puteoli, before finally arriving in Rome. Luke who was traveling with Paul tells us,

“When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him” (Acts 28:16).

And so, the apostle is writing this while under house arrest, literally chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day. He’s not watching the game with the guys, not on the beach with his toes in the sand, not having dinner at a fancy restaurant with his friends. In fact, life was not going very well for him when he writes verse twelve, but he says,

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12).

In other words, Paul says, “No matter whether life is going the way I want it to or not, either way I know the secret of being content.”

Here’s the secret in verse thirteen, here’s the secret of being content in every situation. He says,

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

In other words, the secret of being content is not found in what I have or do not have, the secret of contentment is found in Christ and in Christ alone. That is so important for us to understand because until Christ is all we have, we will never recognize that Christ is all we need.

Chuck Swindoll once said, “Life is 10% of what happens to you and 90% how you respond.” And yet, if we’re honest most of us live as if life is 90% of what happens to us and we really don’t have much power over our response.

But Paul demonstrates how to find the power of contentment. You let everything be stripped away until you have nothing to hold onto but your faith in Jesus Christ. It’s at that point that you recognize how powerful his presence really is, and no matter what you’re going through, he gives you a peace that goes beyond our human ability to understand.

This Thanksgiving, you can search all you want, get all the likes you want, all the followers you want, all the stuff you want, know as much as you want, loving as many people as you can find, but until you experience the goodness of Jesus you will always be dissatisfied. You will always be longing for something more because you were born for eternity, born with a God shaped hole in your heart, creating a spiritual vacuum for something more than this world has to offer. And so, until you let Christ be all that you need, where you can say,

“Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing” (Psalms 16:5, NLT).

You will struggle with discontent, with ingratitude, and with discovering your purpose.

The apostle Paul said, I can be in chains, in need or with plenty, but in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want; by Christ and through him, I can do everything he calls me to do (Philippians 4:13).

And so, making application of this truth, as we begin this week of Thanksgiving, we absolutely need Christ’s strength to help us overcome the enemies of gratitude. And if we’re going to live a life of thankfulness, we’re going to have to dig out the root of envy, we’re going to have to cut it off, and through Christ’s strength stop comparing ourselves to one another. The Bible says it’s foolishness, and so,

“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12).

In other words, you can never win when you are playing the game of comparison. And so, we’re not going to do that because it’s not wise, in fact, Christ is our standard, he is our example. And if we are tempted, we’re not going to do it, because the Bible says,

“If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth” (James 3:14).

Because James says,

“Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil” (James 3:15).

In other words, he says that envy and selfish ambition are worldly, they’re demonic and…

“Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16).

And so, we want to crush it, snuff it out, stop comparing ourselves to others because it creates a spirit of envy which is demonic. In other words, it doesn’t just breed discontentment in our lives, but it steals our gratitude, our giving of thanks, and it is sinful in the eyes of our God who said,

"You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17).

And so, we want to remove the temptation to covet, to envy someone else’s blessing, and so we need to cut out every vain and ungodly opportunity for comparison.

Now, I don’t know how this will play out in your life, but maybe you need to take a social media break to get your gratitude back. Maybe you need to take some of those apps off of your phone, not just the social apps, but the shopping apps too. Some of you need to stop watching HGTV because it is creating discontent with what God blessed you with.

Here’s a helpful hint, learn to celebrate the successes of others. When someone is blessed in a way that you wanted to be blessed, maybe they got the promotion, they got the job, or they got the car you’ve always dreamed of. The Bible says,

“Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15).

And so, learn to celebrate other’s victories because it purifies the intentions of your own heart.

When someone else gets something that you have wanted, praise God with them and for them. As we rejoice with those who rejoice, I don’t know, I can’t prove it, but it just may be that you reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7). And so, what we want to do is cultivate gratitude in our own lives instead of resenting God’s goodness in other people’s lives. In other words, we want to cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

Most of you probably know someone who is a pessimist, always negative, they get up and say, “I feel like it’s going to be a horrible day, it’s probably going to rain all day, and the basement is going to flood.” Well, the Bible says,

“All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast” (Proverbs 15:15).

And so, for the cheerful of heart, they may be experiencing the very same day, but they see the blessings in it because they are always looking for God’s goodness. On the other hand, if you’re looking for bad you will find it, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast.

I admire the apostle Paul’s perspective on life because he believed in the goodness of God. That is what he believed, like Solomon who said,

“Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have. Just dreaming about nice things is meaningless—like chasing the wind” (Ecclesiastes 6:9, NLT).

In other words, if you want to live a life of thankfulness, being filled with gratitude, enjoy what God has given you instead of longing for what you don’t have.

When life is good, thank God for his blessings. When life is not what you would want it to be, thank God for his goodness because…

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

And so, be full of gratitude, full of Thanksgiving, refusing to compare your life or yourself with others, because it is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Instead, celebrate the blessings of others, rejoice with those who rejoice, and give thanks to our God because he is worthy of our praise.

I am learning the secret of being content in any and every situation, and I hope you are too, because Jesus is all I need. I don’t need a new car, a new house, or a new friend, all I need is Jesus.

“God if you don’t give me anything else, just give me Jesus!”

And so, I am going to pursue him with all my heart, and in him I will find joy and true contentment, because he is life, and he truly satisfies.

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